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STUDIES
IN THE
SCRIPTURES

“Search the Scriptures” John 5:39

EDITOR: Arthur W. Pink (1886-1952)

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Studies in the Scriptures appeared without interruption from 1922 to 1953, each issue including six to eight articles addressing a different topic in a series. While virtually unknown to the Christian world when he died, his writings continue to grow in their influence upon God’s people around the world, through their clarity, careful exposition, and Christ-centeredness.

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STUDIES IN THE SCRIPTURES

“Search the Scriptures” John 5:39

EDITOR: Arthur W. Pink

THE IMPECCABILITY OF CHRIST

We are living in a world of sin, and the fearful havoc it has wrought is evident on every side. How refreshing, then, to fix our gaze upon One who is immaculately holy, and who passed through this scene unspoiled by its evil. Such was the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God incarnate. For thirty-three years, He was in immediate contact with sin, yet He was never, to the slightest degree, contaminated. He touched the leper, yet was not defiled, even ceremonially. Just as the rays of the sun shine upon a stagnant pool without being sullied thereby, so Christ was unaffected by the iniquity which surrounded Him. He *“did no sin”* (1Pe 2:22), *“in him is no sin”* (1Jo 3:5 and contrast 1Jo 1:8), He *“knew no sin”* (2Co 5:21), He was *“without sin”* (Heb 4:15). He was *“holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners”* (Heb 7:26).

But not only was Christ sinless, He was impeccable, that is, *incapable of sinning*. No attempt to set forth the doctrine of His wondrous and peerless person would be complete, without considering this blessed perfection. Sad indeed is it to behold the widespread ignorance thereon today, and sadder still to hear and read this precious truth denied. The last Adam differed from the first Adam in His impeccability. Christ was not only able to overcome temptation, but He was unable to be overcome by it, necessarily so, for He was *“the Almighty”* (Rev 1:8). True, Christ was man, but He was the God-man, and as His dominion over the winds and waves, diseases and death, clearly demonstrated—it was impossible that anything should master Him.

The *immutability* of Christ proves His impeccability, or incapability of sinning. *“Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and today, and forever”* (Heb 13:8). Because He was not susceptible to any change, it was impossible for the incarnate Son of God to sin. Herein we behold again His uniqueness. Sinless angels fell, sinless Adam fell. They were but creatures, and creaturehood and mutability are, really, correlative terms. But was not the

manhood of Christ created? Yes, but it was never placed on probation, *it never had a separate existence*. From the very first moment of its conception in the Virgin's womb, the humanity of Christ was taken into union with His Deity, and therefore could not sin.

The *omnipotence* of Christ proves His impeccability. That the Lord Jesus, even during the days of His humiliation, was possessed of omnipotence, is clear from many passages of Scripture. "What things so ever he (the Father) doeth, *these also* doeth the Son likewise....For as the Father raiseth up the dead, and quickeneth them, even so the Son quickeneth whom he will" (Joh 5:19, 21). When we say that Christ possessed omnipotence during His earthly sojourn, we do not mean that He was so endowed by the Holy Spirit, but that He was essentially, inherently, personally, omnipotent. Now to speak of an omnipotent person yielding to sin, is a contradiction in terms. All temptation to sin must proceed from a created being, and hence, it is a finite power, but impossible is it for a finite power to overcome omnipotency.

The *constitution of Christ's person* proves His impeccability. In Him were united (in a manner altogether incomprehensible to created intelligence) the divine and the human natures. Now "God *cannot* be tempted with evil" (Jam 1:13). "It was *impossible* for God to lie" (Heb 6:18). And Christ was "God was manifest in the flesh" (1Ti 3:16), "Immanuel"—God with us (Mat 1:23). Personality centered not in His humanity. Christ was a divine person, who had been "made in the likeness of men" (Phi 2:7). Utterly impossible was it, then, for the God-man to sin. To affirm the contrary, is to be guilty of the most awful blasphemy. It is irreverent speculation to discuss what the human nature of Christ might have done *if* it had been alone. It never was alone. It never had a separate existence. From the first moment of its being, it was united to a divine person.

It is objected to the truth of Christ's impeccability that it is inconsistent with His temptability. A person who cannot sin, it is argued, cannot be tempted to sin. As well might one reason that because an army cannot be defeated, it cannot be attacked. "Temptability depends upon the constitutional *susceptibility*, while impeccability depends upon the *will*. So far as His natural susceptibility, both physical and mental, was concerned, Jesus Christ was open to all forms of human temptation, excepting those that spring out of lust, or corruption of nature. But His peccability, or the possibility of being overcome by these temptations, would depend upon the amount of voluntary resistance which He was able to bring to bear against them. Those temptations were very strong, but if the self-determination of His holy will was stronger than they, then, they could not induce Him to sin, and He would be impeccable. And yet plainly He would be temptable" (W. G. Shedd, 1889).

Probably there were many reasons why God ordained that His incarnate Son should be tempted by men, by the devil, by circumstances. One of these was *to demonstrate His impeccability*. Throw a lighted match into a barrel of gunpowder and there will be an explosion. Throw it into a barrel of water and the match will be quenched. This, in a very crude way, may be taken to illustrate the difference between Satan's tempting us and his tempting of the God-man. In us, there is that which is susceptible to his "fiery darts," but the Holy One could say, "The prince of this world cometh, and *hath nothing in me*" (Joh 14:30). The Lord Jesus was exposed to a far more severe testing and trying than the first Adam was, in order to make manifest His mighty power of resistance.

“We have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, without sin” (Heb 4:15). “This text teaches that the temptations of Christ were ‘without sin’ in their *source* and *nature*, and not merely, as the passage is sometimes explained, that they were ‘without sin’ in their *result*. The meaning is not, that our Lord was tempted in every respect exactly as fallen man is—by inward lust, as well as by other temptations—only He did not outwardly yield to any temptation, but that He was tempted in every way that man is, excepting by that class of temptations that are sinful, because originating in evil and forbidden desire.

“The fact that Christ was almighty and victorious in His resistance does not unfit Him to be an example for imitation to a weak and sorely-tempted believer. Because our Lord overcame His temptations, it does not follow that His conflict and success was an easy one for Him. His victory cost Him tears and blood. ‘His visage was so marred more than any man’ (Isa 52:14). There was the ‘travail of his soul’ (Isa 53:11). In the struggle, He cried, ‘O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me’ (Mat 26:39). Because an army is victorious, it by no means follows that the victory was a cheap one” (William G. Shedd, 1820-1894).

One other objection may, perhaps, be noted, though we hesitate to defile these pages by even transcribing the filthy exhalations of the carnal mind. If the humanity of Christ was, because of its union to His divine person, incapable of sinning, then in view of its being divinely sustained, how could it hunger and thirst, suffer and die? and seeing it *did*, then why was it incapable of yielding to temptation? It is sufficient answer to this impious question to point out that, while the Mediator was commissioned to die (Joh 10:18), He was not commissioned to sin. The human nature of Christ was permitted to function freely and normally. Hence, it wearied and wept, but to sin is *not a normal* act of human nature.

To be the Redeemer of His people, Christ must be “travelling in the greatness of his strength?...mighty to save,” (Isa 63:1). He must have power to overcome all temptation when it assails His person, in order that He may be able to “succour them that are tempted” (Heb 2:18). Here then is one of the solid planks in that platform on which the faith of the Christian rests. Because the Lord Jesus is Almighty, having absolute power over sin, the feeble and sorely-tried saint may turn to Him in implicit confidence, seeking His efficacious aid. Only He who triumphed over sin, both in life and in death, can save me from my sins.

THE EPISTLE TO THE HEBREWS

57. The Faith of Abel (11:4)

The 11th chapter of Hebrews has three divisions. The first, which comprises verses 1 to 3, is introductory, setting forth the *excellency* of faith. The second, which is covered by verses 4 to 7, outlines the *life* of faith. The third, which begins at verse 8 and runs to the end of the chapter, fills in that outline, and as well describes the *achievements* of faith. The

first division we went over in our last article. There we saw the excellency of faith proven by four facts. Faith gives a reality and substantiality unto those things which the Word of God warrants us to hope for (verse 1). Faith furnishes proof to the heart of those spiritual things which cannot be discovered by our natural senses (verse 1). Faith secured to the Old Testament saints a good report (verse 2). Faith enables its favoured possessor to understand that which is incomprehensible to mere reason, imparting a knowledge to which philosophers and scientists are strangers (verse 3). Thus, the tremendous importance and inestimable value of faith is at once apparent.

The second division of our chapter may be outlined thus. First, the beginning of the life of faith (verse 4). Second, the character of the life of faith, showing of what it consists (verse 5). Third, a warning and an encouragement is given (verse 6). Fourth, the end of the life of faith, or the goal to which it conducts (verse 7). That which the Holy Spirit now sets before us is far more than a list of Old Testament worthies or a miniature picture-gallery of the saints of bygone days. To those whom God grants a receptive heart and anointed eye, there is here deep and important doctrinal instruction, as well as most blessed practical teaching. The contents of Hebrews 11 concern our eternal peace and it behoves us to give them our most prayerful and diligent attention. May it please the Spirit of Truth to act as our Guide, as we seek to pass from verse to verse.

“By faith Abel offered unto God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain, by which he obtained witness that he was righteous, God testifying of his gifts: and by it he being dead yet speaketh” (verse 4). Rightly understood, this verse describes *the beginning* of the life of faith. Let us seek to weigh attentively each separate expression in it.

First, it was “by faith” that Abel offered unto God his sacrifice. He is the first man, according to the sacred record, who ever did so. He had no established precedent to follow, no example to emulate, no outward encouragement to stimulate. Thus, his conduct was not suggested by popular custom, nor was his action regulated by “common sense.” Neither carnal reason nor personal inclinations could have moved Abel to present a bleeding lamb for God’s acceptance. How, then, is his strange procedure to be accounted for? Our text answers—it was “by faith” he acted, and not by fancy or by feelings. But what is signified by this expression? Ah, the mere words, “by faith,” are far more familiar unto many, than their real import is understood. Vague and visionary indeed are the conceptions which multitudes now entertain thereon. We must not, then, take anything for granted, but rather proceed slowly and seek to make quite sure of our ground.

The one Scripture which, perhaps, more than any other unlocks for us the meaning of the, “by faith,” which is found so frequently in Hebrews 11, is Romans 10:17. There we read, “Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.” Faith must have a foundation to rest upon, and that foundation must be the Word of Him that cannot lie. God speaks, and the heart receives and acts upon what He says. True, there are two kinds of “hearing,” just as there are two kinds of “faith.” There is an outward “hearing,” and there is an inward “hearing.” The one merely informs, the other influences. The one simply instructs the mind, the other moulds the heart and moves the will. So there is a twofold meaning to the term, “The word of God” (see our remarks on Hebrews 11:3), namely, the Word as written, and the Word as operative, when God speaks in living power to the soul. Hence, there is a twofold “faith.” The one which is merely an intellectual assenting to what

God has revealed, and the other, which is a vital and supernatural principle of action, which “worketh by love” (Gal 5:6).

Now, we need hardly say that it is the *second* of these which is in view here in Hebrews 11:4, and throughout the chapter. But let us move carefully, step by step. It was “by faith” that Abel offered unto God his acceptable sacrifice, and as Romans 10:17 declares, “Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.” It, therefore, follows that God had definitely revealed His will, that Abel believed that revelation, and that he acted accordingly. Now in the Old Testament times, God spake to men sometimes directly, sometimes through others. In this instance, we believe the reference is to what God had said to Adam and Eve, and which they had communicated to Cain and Abel. By turning back to Genesis 3, we discover *what* the Lord said to their parents.

“Unto the woman he said, I will greatly multiply thy sorrow and thy *conception*; in sorrow thou shalt bring forth children; and thy desire shall be to thy husband, and he shall rule over thee. And unto Adam he said, Because thou hast hearkened unto the voice of thy wife, and hast eaten of the tree, of which I commanded thee, saying, Thou shalt not eat of it: cursed is the ground for thy sake; in sorrow shalt thou eat of it all the days of thy life; Thorns also and thistles shall it bring forth to thee; and thou shalt eat the herb of the field; In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return unto the ground; for out of it wast thou taken: for dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return” (Gen 3:16-19). But further, “Unto Adam also and to his wife did the LORD God make coats of skins, and clothed them” (Gen 3:21). Here the Lord spoke to Adam and Eve by action. Four things were clearly intimated. First, that in order for a sinner to stand before the thrice holy God, he needed *a covering*. Second, that that which was of human manufacture (Gen 3:7) was worthless. Third, that God Himself must *provide* the requisite covering. Fourth, that the necessary covering could only be obtained *by death*, by blood-shedding.

In Genesis 3:15 and 21, we have the first Gospel-sermon which was ever preached on this earth, and that by the Lord Himself. Life must come out of death. Cain and Abel and the whole human race sinned in Adam (Rom 5:12, 18-19), and the wages of sin is *death*, penal death. Either I must be paid those wages and suffer that death, or another—an innocent one, on whom death has no claim—must be paid those wages in my stead. And in order to my receiving the benefit of that substitute’s compassion, there must be a link of contact between me and him. *Faith* it is which unites to Christ. Saving faith, then, in its simplest form, is the placing of a Substitute between my guilty self and a sin-hating God.

Now, what we have just gone over above was made known (probably through Adam) to Cain and Abel. How do we know this? Because, as we have seen, Abel brought his offering to God “by faith,” and Romans 10:17 makes it clear that “faith” presupposes a divine revelation. Further confirmation of this is found in Genesis 4:7. When Cain’s countenance fell at the rejection of his offering, the Lord said unto him, “If thou doest well, shalt thou not be accepted? and if thou doest not well, sin lieth at the door.” Thus, a divine institution of sacrifice, clearly defined and made known, is here plainly implied. It was as though God had said to Cain, “Did I promise to accept any other offering than which conformed to My prescription?”

“By faith Abel offered unto God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain” (Heb 11:4). Three things here claim our attention—the spring of Abel’s action (faith), the nature of his

offering, wherein it was more excellent than Cain's. The first of these we have already considered, the second, we will now examine. The language of our present verse refers us back to Genesis 4. There we read, "And Abel, he also brought of the firstlings of his flock and of the fat thereof" (Gen 4:4). His action here ("brought") is in sharp contrast from his parents in Genesis 3:8, who "hid themselves *from* the presence of the LORD God." The contrast is most significant. A consciousness of guilt caused Adam and Eve to flee. A sense of need moved Abel to seek the Lord. The difference between them is to be attributed unto the respective workings of conscience and faith. An uneasy conscience never, of itself, leads to Christ—"And they which heard it, being convicted by their own conscience, *went out* one by one...and Jesus was left alone" (Joh 8:9).

"And Abel, he also brought of the firstlings of his flock and of the fat thereof" (Gen 4:4). The separate mention of the "fat" tells us that the lamb had been slain. By killing the lamb and offering it to God, Abel acknowledged at least five things. First, he owned that God was righteous in driving fallen man out of Eden (Gen 3:24). Second, he owned that he was a guilty sinner and that death was his just due. Third, he owned that God was holy and must punish sin. Fourth, he owned that God was merciful and willing to accept the death of an innocent substitute in his place. Fifth, he owned that he looked for acceptance with God in Christ the Lamb. Therefore did he, *by faith*, place the blood of the firstlings of his flock (type of Him who is "the Firstborn" or Head "of every creature"—Col 1:15) between his sins and the avenging justice of God.

Here, then, is where the life of faith begins. There must first be a bowing unto the righteous verdict of the divine Judge that I am a sinner, a transgressor of His holy law, and therefore, justly under its "curse" or death-sentence. No excuses have I to offer, no merits have I to plead, no mitigation of the sentence can I fairly ask for. My best performances are only filthy rags in the sight of Him who knows that they were wrought out of self-love and to promote self's interests, rather than for His glory. I can but plead guilty and hide my face for very shame. But as the Gospel of His grace is applied to my stricken conscience by the power of the Spirit, hope revives. As He makes known to me the amazing fact that the Lamb of God died so that all who bow to God's verdict, own themselves as lost, and hate themselves for their sins, might live. And then, faith stretches forth a trembling hand and lays hold of the Redeemer and the criminal is pardoned and accepted by God.

Having pondered the character of Abel's sacrifice, let us now consider wherein it was "more excellent" than Cain's. In Genesis 4:3, we read, "Cain brought of the fruit of the ground an offering unto the LORD." Cain was no infidel, for he owned the existence of God. Nor was he irreligious, for he came before Him as a worshipper, but he refused to conform to the divine appointment. By carefully noting the nature of his offering, we may observe four things. First, it was a bloodless one, and "without shedding of blood is no remission" (Heb 9:22). Second, it was merely the fruit of his toils, the product of his labours. Third, he deliberately ignored the sentence of God in Genesis 3:17, "Cursed is the ground." Fourth, he despised the grace made known in Genesis 3:21.

Thus, in Cain we behold the first *hypocrite*. He refused to comply with the revealed will of God, yet cloaked his rebellion by coming before Him as a worshipper. He would not obey the divine appointment, yet brought an offering to the Lord. He believed not that his case was so desperate that death was his due, and could only be escaped by another

suffering it in his stead. Yet he sought to approach unto the Lord and patronize Him. This is the "way of Cain," spoken of by Jude (Jude 1:11). It is the way of self-will, of unbelief, of disobedience, and of religious hypocrisy. What a contrast from Abel! Thus, we see how there was a striking foreshadowment from the beginning of human history that the church on earth is a *mixed* assembly, made up of wheat and tares!

Cain and Abel stand before us as two representative men. They head the two, and the only two classes, which are to be found in the religious world. They typified, respectively, the two sections of Christendom. Cain, the elder, who is mentioned *first* in Genesis 4, and therefore represents the prominent section, sets forth that vast company who honour God with their lips, but whose hearts are far from Him. Who think to pay God a compliment, but who refuse to meet His requirements. Who pose as worshippers, but live to please themselves. Abel, on the other hand, *hated by* Cain, foreshadowed that "little flock," the members of which bow to God's will, comply with His commandments, fly to Christ for refuge, and are accepted by God.

Most solemnly too do Cain and Abel furnish us with a striking example of the *sovereignty* of divine grace. Both of them were "shapen in iniquity and conceived in sin," for both were the fallen sons of fallen parents, and both of them were born outside of Eden. Yet one was "of that wicked one" (1Jo 3:12), while the other was one of God's elect. Marvelously and most blessedly, may we here behold the fact that sovereign grace is "no respecter of persons," but passes by (to human ideas) the most likely and pitches upon the unlikely. Being the younger of the two, Abel was inferior in dignity. God Himself said to Cain, "Thou shalt rule over him" (Gen 4:7). But spiritual blessings do not follow the order of external privileges. Shem is preferred before Japheth (Gen 5:32, 10:2, 21), Isaac before Ishmael, Jacob before Esau.

"By (a divinely-given and divinely-wrought) faith, Abel offered unto God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain" (Heb 11:4). The superiority of Abel's worship may, perhaps, be set forth thus. First, it was offered *in obedience* to God's revealed will. This lies at the very foundation of all actions which are acceptable unto God. Nothing can be pleasing unto Him except that which *He* has stipulated, every thing else is "will worship" (Col 2:23). Second, it was offered "by faith." This tells us that there was something more than the mere performance of an outward duty. Only that is approved of God which proceeds from the living principle of faith, kindled in the heart by the Holy Spirit. True obedience and faith are never apart. Therefore, we read of "the obedience to the faith" (Rom 1:5). Yet though inseparable, they are distinguishable in thought. Faith respects the word of *promise*, obedience the word of *command*, for promises and precepts go hand in hand. We act in obedience when the commandment is uppermost in our minds and hearts, which puts us to the performing of duties. We act in faith when the promise is looked to and the reward is counted upon.

Third, Abel had a "willing mind" (2Co 8:12). Faith works by "love" (Gal 5:6). This is seen in the fact that he brought *of his best*. It was "of the firstlings of his flock," which God afterwards took as His portion (Exo 13:12). When slain, it was the "fat" which he presented, which later God also claimed as His own (Lev 3:16; 7:25). Thus, it was of the most precious and valuable things on earth which Abel brought to God. So it is our best which He requires of us. "Son, give me thine heart" (Pro 23:26). It is "with the *heart* man

believeth unto righteousness” (Rom 10:10). Fourth, his sacrificial offering looked forward to and adumbrated the great sacrifice, the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world. In all these four things, Abel excelled Cain. Cain did not act in obedience, for he disregarded the divine appointment. He did not offer in faith. Nothing is said of any choice of excellent fruit. It was as though he brought the first which came to hand. His offering contained no foreshadowment of Christ.

Ere passing on, let us seek to gather up the *practical* teaching of what has been before us. 1. To serve God acceptably, we must disregard all human inventions, lean not unto our own understandings or inclinations, and adhere strictly to the revelation which He has made of His will. 2. All obedience, service, and worship must proceed from faith, for, “Without faith it is impossible to please him” (Heb 11:6). Where this be lacking, no matter how exact the performance of our duty, it is unacceptable to God. 3. We are to serve God with the best that we have—with the best of our abilities and with the best of our substance. Only as *love* constrains us will there be a doing it “heartily as unto the Lord” (Col 3:23). 4. In all our religious exercises, Christ must be before us, for only as they are perfumed with His merits can they meet with God’s acceptance.

“By which he obtained witness that he was righteous” (Heb 11:4). There is a little uncertainty as to whether the, “By which,” refers to Abel’s “faith” or to the “more excellent sacrifice” which he offered. Though the latter be the nearest antecedent, yet with Owen, Gouge, and Manton, we believe the reference is to his faith. First, because it is not the apostle’s design in this chapter to specify the kind of sacrifices which were acceptable unto God. Second, because his obvious purpose was to illustrate and demonstrate the efficacy of faith. Third, because the apostle here exemplifies what he had just said of the Old Testament saints, namely, that by faith, “The elders obtained a good report” (Heb 11:2). Fourth, because this agrees much more closely with the Analogy of Faith. By the one perfect offering of Christ is the Christian *constituted* “righteous” before God, but it is through faith that he obtains *witness* of the same to his heart.

“By which he obtained witness that he was righteous” (Heb 11:4). Herein we are supplied with an illustration of, “For them that honour me, I will honour” (1Sa 2:30). In keeping God’s precepts, there is “great reward” (Psa 19:11). God will be no man’s debtor. He, who obediently, humbly, trustfully, lovingly, respects His appointments and obeys His commandments, shall be recompensed—not as a recognition of merit, but as what is divinely meet and gracious. God did not leave Abel in a state of uncertainty, ignorant as to whether or not his offering was approved. The Lord was pleased to assure Abel that the sacrifice had been accepted and that he was accounted just before Him. The Greek word for, “he obtained witness,” is the same as is rendered, “obtained a good report,” in verse 2.

“By which he obtained witness that he was righteous.” This too is recorded for our instruction and comfort. From these words, we learn it is the good pleasure of God that His obedient and believing children should *know* His mind concerning them. Where there is a justifying faith in Christ, which moves the Christian to walk according to the divine precepts, God honours that faith by granting assurance to its possessor. When we are enabled by faith to plead the most excellent Sacrifice and to present acceptable worship unto God, then we obtain testimony from Him, through His Word and by His Spirit, that our persons and services are accepted by Him. In Abel’s case, He received from God an

outward attestation. In the case of the Christian today, it is the inward authentication of his conscience (2Co 1:12), to which the Holy Spirit also adds His confirmation (Rom 8:15). As we are now treating of this subject at length in our articles upon "Assurance," we will not enlarge any further here.

"God testifying of his gifts" (Heb 11:4). We are not told in Genesis 4 in so many words *how* He did so, but the Analogy of Faith leaves little room for doubt. By comparing other Scriptures, it seems clear that the Lord evidenced His acceptance of Abel's offering (and thereby testified that he was "righteous") by causing fire to descend from heaven and consume the sacrifice, which, in turn, ascended to Him as a sweet-smelling savour. In Leviticus 9:24, we read, "And there came a fire out from before the LORD, and consumed upon the altar the burnt offering and the fat." So too, we are told, "Then the fire of the LORD fell, and consumed the burnt sacrifice" (1Ki 18:38). Compare also Judges 6:21, 13:19-20; 1Ch 21:26; Psa 20:3 margin.

"By which (faith) he obtained witness that he was righteous, God testifying of his gifts." The second clause is explanatory of the former. The parallel is found in Genesis 4:4, where we read, "And the LORD had respect unto Abel *and* to his offering." "He testified in the approbation of his offering that He had respect unto his person. That is, that He judged, esteemed, and accounted him righteous, for otherwise God is no respecter of persons. Whosoever God accepts or respects, He testifieth him to be righteous, that is, to be justified and freely accepted with Him. This Abel was by faith, antecedently unto his offering. He was not made righteous, he was not justified by his sacrifice, but therein showed his faith by his works. And God, by acceptance of his works of obedience, justified him, as Abraham was justified by works, namely, *declaratively*, He declared him so to be. Our persons must be first justified, before our works of obedience can be accepted with God. For by that acceptance, He testifies that we are righteous" (John Owen, 1616-1683).

"And by it he being dead yet speaketh" (Heb 11:4). Marvellously full are the words of God. His commandment is "exceeding broad" (Psa 119:96). In every sentence of Holy Writ, there is both a depth and breadth which our unaided minds are incapable of perceiving and appreciating. Only as the Holy Spirit, the Inspirer and Giver of the Word, deigns to "guide" us (Joh 16:13), only as He teaches us to compare passage with passage, so that in His light we "see light" (Psa 36:9), are we enabled to discern, in fuller measure, the beauty, meaning, and many-sidedness of any verse or clause. Such is the case in the sentence now before us. We are convinced that there is at least a threefold meaning and reference in it. Briefly, we will consider these in turn.

"And by it he being dead yet speaketh." The first and most obvious signification of these words is that, by his faith's-obedience, as recorded in Genesis 4 and Hebrews 11, Abel preaches to us a most important sermon. His worship and the fruits thereof are registered in the everlasting records of Holy Scripture, and thereby, he speaketh as evidently as though we heard him audibly. There comes to us a voice from the far distant past, from the other side of the flood, saying, "Fallen man can only approach unto God through the death of an innocent Substitute. Yet none save God's elect will ever feel their need of such, set aside their own inclinations, bow to God's revealed will, and submit to His appointment. But they who do so obtain witness that they are 'righteous' (cf. Mat

23:35), and receive divine assurance that they are accepted in the Beloved, and that their obedience (imperfect in itself, yet proceeding from a heart which desires and seeks to *fully* please Him) is approved for His sake.”

“And by it he being dead yet speaketh.” And *how* did he die? By the murderous hand of a religious hypocrite who hated him. Then began that which the apostle affirms still to continue, “He that was born after the flesh persecuted him that was born after the Spirit” (Gal 4:29). Here was the first public and visible display of that enmity between the (mystical) seed of the woman and the (mystical) seed of the serpent. Abel’s death was, therefore, also a pledge and representation of the death of Christ Himself—murdered by the religious world. Those whom God approves must expect to be disproved of men, more particularly by those professing to be Christian. But the time is coming when the present situation shall be reversed. In Genesis 4:10, God said to Cain, “The voice of thy brother’s blood *crieth* unto me from the ground.” Abel’s own blood “speaketh,” crying to God for vengeance.

“And by it he being dead yet speaketh.” Though ruthlessly slain by his brother, the soul of Abel exists in a separate state, alive, conscious, and vocal. He is among that company of whom the apostle said, “I saw under the altar the souls of them that were slain for the word of God, and for the testimony which they held: and they *cried* with a loud voice, saying, How long, O Lord, holy and true, dost thou not judge and avenge our blood on them that dwell on the earth?” (Rev 6:9-10). Thus, Abel is not only a type of the persecution and suffering of the godly, but gives a pledge of the certain vengeance which God will take in due time upon their oppressors. God shall yet avenge His own elect (those in heaven as well as those on earth) who cry unto Him day and night for Him *to* avenge them (Luk 18:7-8). Let us, then, seek grace to possess our souls in patience (verse), knowing that ere long God will reward the righteous and punish the wicked.

THE LIFE OF DAVID

9. *His Flight to Ziklag*

There are times when God’s tender love for His people *seems* to be contradicted by the sore testings which He sends upon them, times when His providences appear to clash with His promises. Then it is that faith is tested and so often fails. Then it is also that the superabounding grace of God is evidenced by delivering the one who has given way to unbelief. These principles are illustrated again and again on the pages of Holy Writ, especially in the Old Testament. And one of their chief values is for us to lay them to heart, turn them into earnest prayer, and seek to profit from them. God forbid that we should “wrest” them to our destruction (2Pe 3:16). God forbid that we should deliberately sin in order that grace may abound (Rom 6:1-2). And God forbid that we should take the failures of those who preceded us as excuses for our own grievous falls, thus endeavouring to

shelter behind the faults of others. Rather, let us seek grace to regard them as danger-signals set up to deter us from slipping into the snares which tripped them.

To Abraham, God promised a numerous seed (Gen 12:2), but His providences seemed to run counter to the fulfillment. Sarah was barren! But the sterility of her womb presented no difficulty to Omnipotence. Nor was there any need for Abraham to attempt a fleshly compromise by seeking a son through Hagar (Gen 16). True, for a while, his plan appeared to succeed, but the sequel not only demonstrated the needlessness for such a device, but in Ishmael a bitter harvest was reaped. And this is recorded as a warning for us. To Jacob, God said, "Return unto the land of thy fathers, and to thy kindred; and I will be with thee" (Gen 31:3). During the course of his journey, messengers informed him that Esau was approaching with four hundred men, and we read that, "Jacob was greatly afraid and distressed" (Gen 32:7). How human! True, and how sad, how dishonouring to God! What cause for fear was there when JEHOVAH was with him? O for grace to "trust in him at all times" (Psa 62:8).

Learn, dear brethren and sisters, that faith must be tested—to prove its genuineness. Yet only He who gives faith can maintain it, and for this we must constantly seek unto Him. What has just been before us receives further illustration in the subject of these articles. David was the king elect, yet another wore the crown. The son of Jesse had been anointed unto the throne, yet Saul was now bitterly persecuting him. Had God forgotten to be gracious? No, indeed. Had He changed His purpose? That could not be (Mal 3:6). Why, then, should the slayer of Goliath now be a fugitive? He had been appointed to be master of vast treasures, yet he was now reduced to begging bread (1Sa 21:3). Faith *must* be tested, and we *must* learn by painful experience the bitter consequences of *not trusting* in the Lord with all our hearts, and the evil fruits which are borne whenever we lean unto our own understandings, take matters into our own hands, and seek to extricate ourselves from trouble.

Concerning Hezekiah, we read that "God left him, to try him, that he might know all that was in his heart" (2Ch 32:31). None of us knows how weak he is till God withdraws His upholding grace (as He did with Peter) and we are left to ourselves. True, the Lord has plainly told us that "without me ye can do nothing" (Joh 15:5). We think we believe that word, and in a way we do. Yet there is a vast difference between the non-calling into question of a verse of Scripture, an assenting to its verity, and an inward acquaintance with the same in our own personal history. It is one thing to believe that I am without strength or wisdom, it is another to *know* through actual experience. Nor is this, as a rule obtained through a single episode, any more than a nail is generally driven in securely by one blow of the hammer. No, we have to learn, and re-learn, so stupid are we. The truth of God has to be burned into us in the fiery furnace of affliction. Yet this ought not to be so, and would not be so, if we paid more heed to these Old Testament warnings, furnished in the biographies of the saints of yore.

In our last article, we saw that, following the murderous attack of Saul upon him, David fled to Naioth. But thither did his relentless enemy follow him. Wondrously did God interpose on His servant's behalf. Yet, being a man of like passions with ourselves, and the supernatural grace of God not supporting him at the time, instead of David's fears being thoroughly removed, and his waiting quietly with Samuel to receive a word of divine

guidance, he was occupied with his immediate danger from Saul, and after vainly conferring with Jonathan, took things into his own hands and fled to Nob. There he lied to the priest, by means of which he obtained bread, but at the fearful cost of Saul reeking vengeance through Doeg in slaying eighty-five of those who wore the linen ephod. Disastrous indeed are the consequences when we seek to have our own way and hue out a path for ourselves. How differently had things turned out if David trusted the Lord and left Him to undertake for him!

God is all-sufficient in Himself to supply all our need (Phi 4:19) and to do for us far more exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think (Eph 3:20). This He can do either in an immediate way, or mediately if He sees fit to make use of creatures as instruments to fulfill His pleasure and communicate what He desires to impart to us. God is never at a loss. All things, all events, all creatures, are at His sovereign disposal. This foundational truth of God's all-sufficiency should be duly improved by us, taking heed that we do not be our thoughts or actions reflect upon or deny this divine perfection. And this we certainly do when we use *unlawful* means to escape imminent dangers. Such was the case with Abram (Gen 20) and Isaac (Gen 26) when they denied their wives, concluding that that was a necessary expedient to save their lives—as though God were not able to save them in a better and more honourable way. Such we shall see was the case with David at Ziglax.

We also made brief reference in our last article to the fact that when the saint is out of touch with God, when he is in a backslidden state, his behaviour is so different from his former conduct, so inconsistent with his profession, that his actions now present a strange enigma. And yet that enigma is capable of simple solution. It is only in God's light that any of us "see light" (Psa 36:9). As the Lord Jesus declares, "He that followeth me shall not walk in darkness" (Joh 8:12). Yes, but it is only as we are really "following" Him, our hearts engaged with the example which He has left us, that we shall see, know, and take that path which is pleasing and honouring to Him. There is only one other alternative, and that is seeking to please either our fellows or ourselves, and where this is the case, only confusion and trouble can ensue.

When communion with God (who is "light") is severed, nothing but spiritual darkness is left. The world is a "dark place" (2Pe 1:19), and if we are not ordering our steps by the Word (Psa 119:105), then we shall flounder and stumble. "The backslider in heart shall be filled with *his own ways*" (Pro 14:14), not with the "ways" of God (Psa 103:7). Where fellowship with the Lord is broken, the mind is no longer illuminated from heaven, the judgment is clouded, and a lack of wisdom, yea, folly itself, will then characterize all our actions. Here is the key to much in our lives, the explanation of those "unwise doings," those "foolish mistakes" for which we have had to pay so dearly—we are not controlled by the Holy Spirit, we acted in the energy of the flesh, we sought the counsel of the ungodly, or followed the dictates of common sense.

Nor is there any determining to what lengths the backslider may go, or how foolishly and madly he may not act. Solemnly is this illustrated in the case now before us. As we saw in the preceding paper, David was worried at being unarmed, and asked the high priest if there were no weapon to hand. On being informed that the only one available was "the sword of Goliath," which had been preserved in the tabernacle as a memorial of the Lord's

goodness to His people, David exclaimed, "There is none like that; give it me" (1Sa 21:9). Alas, "How had the fine gold become dim"! He who, when walking in the fear of the Lord, had not hesitated to advance against Goliath with nothing in his hand save a sling, now that the fear of man possessed him, places his confidence in a giant's sword. Perhaps both writer and reader are inclined to marvel at this, but have we not more reason to *mourn* as we see in this incident an accurate portrayal of many of our past failures?

"And David arose, and fled that day for fear of Saul, and went to Achish the king of Gath" (1Sa 21:10). Fearing that Saul would pursue him were he to make for any other part of the land of Israel, and not being disposed to organize a company against him, David took refuge in Gath of the Philistines. But what business had he in the territory of God's enemies? None whatever, for he had not gone there in *His* interests. Verily, "Oppression maketh a wise man mad" (Ecc 7:7). Few indeed conduct themselves in extreme difficulties without taking some manifestly false step. We should, therefore, "Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation" (Mat 26:41), earnestly seeking from God the strength which will alone enable us to successfully resist the devil.

"And David arose, and fled that day for fear of Saul, and went to Achish the king of Gath." It is evident from what follows that David hoped he would not be recognized. Thus it is with the backslidden Christian as he fraternizes with the world. He attempts to conceal his colours, hoping that he will not be recognized as a follower of the Lord Jesus. Yet behold the consummate folly of David. He journeyed to Gath with "the sword of Goliath" in his hands! Wisdom has indeed deserted him. As another has said, "Common prudence might have taught him that, if he sought the friendship of the Philistines, the sword of Goliath was not the most likely instrument to conciliate their favour." But where a saint has grieved the Holy Spirit, even common sense no longer regulates him.

"And the servants of Achish said unto him, Is not this David the king of the land? did they not sing one to another of him in dances, saying, Saul hath slain his thousands, and David his ten thousands?" (1Sa 21:11) God will not allow His people to remain incognito in this world. He has appointed that they should "be blameless and harmless, the sons of God, without rebuke, in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation, among whom" they are to "shine as lights in the world" (Phi 2:15), and any efforts of theirs to annul this, He will thwart. Abraham's deception was discovered. Peter's attempt to conceal his discipleship failed—his very speech betrayed him. So here, David was quickly recognized. And thus it will be with us. And mercifully is this the case, for God will not have His own to settle down among and enjoy the friendship of His enemies.

"And David laid up these words in his heart, and was sore afraid of Achish the king of Gath" (1Sa 21:12). What right had David to be at Gath? None whatever, and God soon caused circumstances to arise which showed him that he was out of his place, though in wondrous mercy, He withheld any chastisement. How sad to hear of him, who had so courageously advanced against Goliath, now, being "sore afraid"! "The righteous are bold as lion" (seems wrong) (Pro 28:1). Yes, the "righteous," that is, they who are right with God, walking with Him, and so sustained by His grace. Sadder still is it to see how David now acted. Instead of casting himself on God's mercy, confessing his sin, and seeking His intervention, he had recourse to deceit and played the fool.

“And he changed his behaviour before them, and feigned himself mad in their hands, and scabbled on the doors of the gate, and let his spittle fall down upon his beard” (1Sa 21:13). Afraid to rely upon the man whose protection he had sought, the anointed of God now feigned himself to be crazy. It was then that he learned experimentally, “It is better to trust in the LORD than to put confidence in princes” (Psa 118:9). The king elect “feigned himself mad.” “Such was the condition into which David had sunk himself. Saul himself could scarcely have wished for a deeper degradation” (Benjamin W. Newton, 1807-1899). Learn from this, dear reader, what still indwells the true saint, and which is capable of any and every wickedness, but for the restraining hand of God. Surely we have need to pray daily, “Hold thou me up, and I shall be safe” (Psa 119:117).

“Then said Achish unto his servants, Lo, ye see the man is mad: wherefore then have ye brought him to me? Have I need of mad men, that ye have brought this fellow to play the mad man in my presence? Shall this fellow come into my house?” (1Sa 21:14-15). How evident is it to the anointed eye, from the whole of this incident, that the Holy Spirit’s object here was not to glorify David, but to magnify the longsuffering grace of God, and to furnish salutary instruction and solemn warning for us? Throughout the Scriptures, the character of man is accurately painted in the colours of reality and truth.

Many are the lessons to be learned from this sad incident. Though ingenious falsehoods may seem to promote present security, yet they insure future disgrace. They did for Abraham, for Isaac, for Jacob, for Peter, for Ananias. Leaning unto his own understanding conducted David to Gath, but he soon learned, from the shame of his folly, that he had not walked in wisdom. Not only was David deeply humiliated by this pitiful episode, but JEHOVAH was grievously dishonoured thereby. Marvelous indeed was it that he escaped with his life. This can only be attributed to the secret, but invincible workings, of His power moving upon the king of the Philistines, for as the title of Psalm 34 informs us, “Achish drove him away, and he departed.” Such was the means which an infinitely merciful God used to screen His child from imminent danger.

From Gath, David fled to the cave of Adullam. Blessed is it to learn of the repentant and chastened spirit in which the servant of God entered it. The 34th Psalm was written by him then (as its superscription informs us), and in it the Holy Spirit has given us to see the exercises of David’s heart at that time. There, we find him blessing the Lord, his soul making his boast in Him (Psa 34:1-3). There, we hear him saying, “I sought the LORD, and he heard me, and delivered me from all my fears” (Psa 34:4). There, he declares, “This poor man cried, and the LORD heard him, and saved him out of all his troubles. The angel of the LORD encampeth round about them that fear him, and delivereth them” (Psa 34:6-7).

But it was more than praise and gratitude which filled the restored backslider. David had learned some valuable lessons experimentally. Therefore, we hear him saying, “Come, ye children, hearken unto me: I will teach you the fear of the LORD. What man is he that desireth life, and loveth many days, that he may see good? Keep thy tongue from evil, and thy lips from speaking guile. Depart from evil, and do good; seek peace, and pursue it” (Psa 34:11-14). “He had proved the evil of lying lips and a deceitful tongue, and now was able to warn others of the pitfall into which he had fallen” (Benjamin W. Newton). But it is blessed to mark that he warned, not as one who was left to reap the harvest of his doings,

but as one who could say, “The LORD redeemeth the soul of his servants: and none of them that trust in him shall be desolate” (Psa 34:22).

THE ONE THING NEEDFUL

Sermon #1015 by C. H. Spurgeon

“But one thing is needful” (Luk 10:42). We have no difficulty whatever in deciding what that one thing is. We are not allowed to say that it is the Saviour, for He is not a thing. And we are not permitted to say that it is attention to our own salvation, for, although that would be true, it is not mentioned in the context. The one thing needful, evidently, is that which Mary chose—that good part which should not be taken away from her. Very clearly, this was to sit at Jesus’ feet and hear His word. If any thing be plain at all in Holy Scripture, it is most clear that this is the one thing needful, to sit at Jesus’ feet and hear His word. This and nothing less, this and nothing more.

The mere posture of sitting down and listening to the Saviour’s word was nothing in itself. It was that which it indicated. It indicated, in Mary’s case, a readiness to believe what the Saviour taught, to accept and obey—nay, to delight in the precepts which fell from His lips. And this is the one thing needful. He that hath it hath the spirit of grace and life. To sit at Jesus’ feet implies *submission*. Such an one is no longer resisting His power. He has cast down the weapons of his rebellion, and has come humbly to acknowledge the Redeemer as Lord and King in his soul. This is needful—absolutely needful, for no rebel can enter the kingdom of heaven with the weapons of rebellion in his hands. We cannot know Christ while we resist Christ. We must be reconciled to His gentle sway and confess that He is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

To sit at Jesus’ feet implies *faith* as well as submission. Mary believed in what Jesus said, and therefore, sat there to be taught by Him. It is absolutely necessary that we have faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, in His power as God and man, in His death as being expiatory, in His crucifixion as being a sacrifice for our sins. We must trust Him for time and for eternity, in all His relationships as Prophet, Priest, and King. We must rely upon Him. He must be our hope, our salvation, our all in all. This one thing is an absolute necessity. Without it, we are undone. A believing submission and a submissive faith in Christ we must have or perish.

But sitting at Jesus’ feet implies also, that having submitted and believed, we now desire to be His disciples. *Discipleship* is too often forgotten. It is as needful as faith. A man cannot be saved unless he becomes a learner in the school of Christ, and learner too in a practical sense, being willing to practice what he learns. Only he who does the Master’s will knows His doctrine. The believer’s position is that of a pupil and the Lord Jesus is his teacher. Except we be converted and become as little children, we can in no wise enter into the kingdom of heaven. Sitting at the feet of Jesus indicates the child-like spirit of true discipleship, and this is the one thing needful. There is no salvation apart from it.

It meant also *service*, for though Mary was not apparently engaged in waiting upon Christ as Martha was, yet she was, in very truth, ministering unto Him in a deeper and truer sense. No one gives greater joy to a public speaker than an attentive listener. No one serves a teacher better than he who is an apt and attentive scholar. The first duty, indeed, of the student to the tutor is that he be cheerful in accepting and diligent in retaining what is taught. In this sense, Mary was really waiting upon Christ in one of His loftiest capacities, namely, that of a Teacher and Prophet in the midst of Israel. In that same spirit, had the Master only intimated it, she would have risen to wash His feet, or anoint His head, or wait at table, as Martha did. But she would, while she was performing these active duties, have continued spiritually in her first posture. She could not, of course, have continued literally sitting at the feet of the Saviour, but her heart would have remained in the condition which that posture indicated. She was in the fittest position for service, for she waited to hear what her Lord would have her to do. We must all be servants, too, as we have been servants of unrighteousness, we must by grace submit ourselves unto the rules of Jesus, and become servants of righteousness or else we miss the one thing that is indispensable for the entrance into heaven.

Sitting at the feet of Jesus also signifies *love*. She would not have been sitting there at ease and happy in mind, if she had not loved Him. There was a charm in the very tone of His words to her. She knew how He had loved her, and therefore, each syllable was music to her soul. She looked up again and again, I doubt not, into that dear face, and often caught the meaning of the words more readily as she read His countenance, marked His eyes oftentimes suffused with tears, and ever bright with holy sympathy. Her love to His person made her a willing learner, and we must be the same. We must not learn of Christ like unwilling truant boys, who go to school and must needs have learning flogged into them. We must be eager to learn. We must open our mouth wide that He may fill it. Like the thirsty earth when it needs the shower, our soul must break for the longing it hath towards His commandments at all times. We must rejoice in His statutes more than gold, yea, than much fine gold. When we are moved by this spirit, we have found the one thing needful.

Having laid before you the meaning of the text, that to sit at Jesus' feet is the one thing necessary, for a literal translation of the text would be "of one thing there is a necessity." Let us take the text as it stands and notice in it four things. The first is a word of *consideration*—the disjunctive conjunction, "But." The Saviour bids us to make a pause. He says, "*But* one thing is needful." Then there comes a word of *necessity*—"one thing is *needful*." Thirdly, a word of concentration—"one thing is needful." And then a word of *immediateness*—"one thing *is* needful"—needful now, at once.

I. To begin then, here is a word of CONSIDERATION, which, as I have already said, is interjected into the middle of our Lord's brief word to Martha. Martha is very busy. She is rather quick-tempered also and she speaks to the Saviour somewhat shortly. And the Master says, "Martha, Martha"—very tenderly, kindly, gently, with only the slightest tinge of rebuke in His tone, "Martha, Martha, thou art careful and troubled about many things—but, but, but wait awhile and hear." That wise and warning, *but*, may be very useful to many here. You are engaged today in business—very diligent you are in it. You throw your whole energy into your trading, as you must, if you would succeed. You rise up early

and you sit up late. Shall I say a word that should discourage your industry? I will not—*but, but* is there nothing else?—is this life all? Is money-making everything? Is wealth worth gaining merely for the sake of having it said, “He died worth fifty thousand pounds”? Is it so?

Perhaps, you are a very hard working man. You have very little rest during the week, and in order to bring up your family comfortably, you strain every nerve. You live as you should, economically, and you work diligently. From morning to night, the thought of you is, “How shall I fill these many little mouths? How shall I bring them up properly? How shall I, as a working man, pay my way?” Very right! I wish all working men would be equally thoughtful and economical, and that there were fewer of those foolish spendthrifts who waste their substance when they have it, and who the moment there is a frost, or they are out of employ, become paupers, loafing upon the charity of others. I commend your industry, *but, but, but*, at the same time, is that all? Were you made only to be a machine for digging holes, laying bricks, or cutting out pieces of wood? Were you created only to stand at a counter and measure or weigh out goods? Do you think your God made you for that and that only? Is this the chief end of man—to earn so many shillings a week and try to make ends meet therewith? As a man with a soul, capable of thought and judgment, and not a mere animal like a dog, nor a machine like a steam engine, can you stand up and look at yourself and say, “I believe I am perfectly fulfilling my destiny”? I beg this morning to interject that quiet, *but*, right into the middle of your busy life and ask from you space for consideration, a pause for the voice of wisdom, that a hearing may be granted her. Business? Labour? Yes, but there is a higher bread to be earned and there is a higher life to be considered. Hence, the Lord puts it, “Labour not for the meat that perisheth,” that is to say, not for that first and foremost, “but for that meat which endureth unto everlasting life” (Joh 6:27). God hath made man that he may glorify Him, and whatever else man accomplishes, if he attains not to this end, his life is a disastrous failure.

Now, I have spoken thus to the busy, but I might speak, and I should have certainly as good a claim to do so, to those who are lovers of pleasure. They are not cumbered with much serving, rather they laugh at those who cumber themselves about anything. They are as merry as the birds. Their life is as the flight of a butterfly, which lightly floats from flower to flower. Now, thou gay young man, what doth Solomon say to thee? “Rejoice, O young man, in thy youth; and let thy heart cheer thee in the days of thy youth, and walk in the ways of thine heart, and in the sight of thine eyes: *but*”—there comes in a pause, and the cool hand of wisdom is laid upon the hot brow of folly, and the youth is asked to think awhile, “*but* know thou, that for all these things God will bring thee into judgment” (Ecc 11:9). It cannot be that an immortal spirit was made for frivolities. Oh, pause awhile, thou careless, godless one, and hear the voice that saith unto thee, “*but*.” There is something more than the fool’s laugh. All things are not a comedy. Death is serious and heaven and hell, and should not life be? Stop, stop, and let this “*but*” sound in thine ears.

I take liberty, moreover, to address the same word to religious people, who, perhaps, need it as much as others. They will, of course, agree with anything I can say about the mere worldling or the profligate, but will they listen to me when I say to them, “You are very diligent in your religion. You are attentive to all its outward rites and ceremonies, You believe the articles of your church, but, but, do you know that all this is nothing,

unless you sit at Jesus' feet?" We may do what the church tells us and never do what Christ tells us, for these may be different things, and the church is not our Saviour, but Christ. We may believe what a certain creed tells us, but not believe what Jesus teaches. Ay, and we may believe even what the Bible itself teaches to us, or think we believe it, but if our heart has never made submission to the Teacher Himself, so as to sit at His feet and receive the truth obediently from Him, our religion is altogether vain.

Yes, and let me say, even to those of you who can honestly declare that Christ is your sole confidence, it is possible for you to forget the necessity of sitting at His feet. You, dear brethren, are looking to His precious blood alone for your salvation, and His name is sweet to you, and you desire in all things to be conformed to His will. So far it is well with you, for in this you have a measure of sitting at His feet. *But* so had Martha! She loved her Lord, knew His Word, and was a saved soul. You have been very busy this week and have been drifting from your moorings. You have not lived with your Lord in conscious fellowship. You have been full of care and empty prayer. You have not committed your sorrows to your loving Friend. You have blundered on in duty without asking His guidance or assistance. You have not maintained, in your Christian service, the communion of your spirit with the Well-Beloved, and if such has been the case, let me say, "*but*" to you and ask you, as you sit here this morning, to make a little stop in your Sunday School teaching or your street preaching, or whatever else it is that you are so laudably engaged in, and say to yourself, "To me, as a worker, the one thing needful is to keep near my Lord, and I must not so suffer the watering of others to occupy me, as to neglect my own heart, lest I should have to say 'Woe is me, they made me the keeper of the vineyards, but my own vineyard have I not kept.'"

Our text speaks of NECESSITY—one thing is a necessity. If this be proved, it overrides all other considerations. We are nearly right when we say proverbially, "Necessity has no law." Necessity, like hunger, breaks through stone walls. The text claims for sitting at Jesus' feet the first and only necessity. Now, I see all around me a crowd of things *alluring*. Pleasure calls to me. I hear her siren song—but I reply, "I cannot regard thee, for necessity presses upon me to hearken to another voice." Philosophy and learning charm me. Fain would I yield my heart to them, but while I am yet unsaved, the one thing needful demands my first care, and wisdom bids me give it. Not that we love human learning less, but eternal wisdom more. Pearls? Yes. Emeralds? Yes, but bread, in God's name—bread at once, when I am starving in the desert. If you are wise, you will evermore prefer the necessity to the dazzling.

About us are a thousand things *entangling*. This world is very much like the pools we have heard of in India, in which grows a long grass of so clinging a character that, if a man once falls into the water, it is almost certain to be his death, for only with the utmost difficulty could he be rescued from the meshes of the deadly, weedy net, which immediately wraps itself around him. This world is even thus entangling. All the efforts of grace are needed to preserve men from being ensnared with the deceitfulness of riches and the cares of this life. The ledger demands you, the shop requires you, the warehouse-bell rings for you, the theatre invites you. You must live, you say, and you must have a little enjoyment, and consequently, you give your heart to the world. These things, I say, are very entangling, but we must be disentangled from them. "For what shall it profit a man, if

he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?" (Mar 8:36). O sirs! For the one thing needful, all entangling things must be given up. You must lay aside every weight, and the sin that doth so easily beset you, if by any means the one thing needful may be yours.

There are some things very *puzzling*, and some people have a strange delight in being bewildered. It is astonishing the many letters I receive and interviews I am asked to give in order to adjust in people's minds the doctrine of predestination and the fact of free agency. And equally remarkable is the way in which young people, and old people too, will pick out extremely difficult texts, perhaps relating to the Second Advent, or to the battle of Armageddon, and they must needs have these opened up to them before they will believe the Gospel. I think it utterly useless to begin upon such things with those who are unsaved. One thing is needful, sir, and that is by no means a puzzling matter. It is plainly this, that thou *submit thyself* to Jesus Christ and sit at His feet.

Now, why is it that sitting at Jesus' feet is a necessity? It is so, because it is needful for us to have our sins forgiven, but Jesus will never forgive the unhumiliated rebel. If he will not take Jesus to be a Master, the sinner cannot have Him to be a Saviour. As long as we rebel against Him, we cannot be saved by Him. Submission, by repentance and faith, we must have, or our transgressions will remain upon us to our everlasting ruin. It is necessary, because we must have our inbred sins overcome. But none can stay corruption in a man but Christ, who has come to destroy the works of the devil, and to save His people from their sins. Jesus, the Seed of the woman, is the only power that can crush the serpent's head. Only at the feet of Jesus can the divine power be gained which works in us holiness and sanctifies us practically. Therefore, as you must be purified or you cannot enter heaven, you must come to Jesus' feet.

In order to enter heaven, it is necessary that our nature should become like the nature of Christ. This earth is for those who bear the image of the first Adam, but the new heaven and the new earth are for those who bear the image of the second Adam. We must, by some means, acquire the nature of the heavenly Adam, and this must be wrought in us by regeneration and developed by acquaintance with Him. By sitting at His feet and beholding Him, we become changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord. If we reject the Lord Jesus as our Trust, Teacher, and Exemplar, we have no new life, and shall never be admitted within the holy gates, where those alone dwell who are fashioned after His likeness. Woe, woe, woe to the godless, Christless spirit that passeth across the river of death without a hope. Woe, woe, woe eternally to the soul that will not sit at the feet of Jesus! He shall be trodden beneath His feet in His anger and crushed in His hot displeasure. God grant that may never be our portion. To sit at Jesus' feet is the one thing needful then.

And brethren, let me just say and leave this point, it is needful to *every one* of you. It is not some of you who must be there, but all. The wisest must become fools to learn of Him, or fools they are. The most educated and cultured mind must submit to this further culture, or else it is nothing but a barren waste in His sight. One thing is a necessity to you all, high or low, rich or poor—you must sit at Jesus' feet. Some things in this world are necessary, after a measure, but this is necessary without measure. Infinitely needful is it that you sit at Jesus' feet. Needful now, needful in life, needful in life for peace, in death for rest, and in

eternity for bliss! This is needful always. In the highest and most emphatic sense, “one thing is needful.”

(Completed in the October issue.)

GIVING PLACE TO THE DEVIL

“Neither give place to the devil.” Eph 4:27

The verse just quoted sets before us an exhortation which every Christian needs to take seriously to heart. Many believers give place to the devil unconsciously, because they are ignorant of his devices. But this ought not to be. The Scriptures clearly expose them, but unless we diligently study the Word, we shall neither be forewarned nor forearmed. In order to fight successfully against a subtle and powerful enemy, it is of first importance to be well informed of the tactics he employs and the methods he follows. The great enemy of our souls hides himself behind many unsuspected forms. His chief weapon is deception. “The Devil, and Satan, which *deceiveth* the whole world” (Rev 12:9). Only as the Holy Spirit gives us to see light from the light of the Word are we able to discern and detect Satan’s many disguises.

Now there is a real difference between “giving place to the devil” and being “overcome” by him, yet there is a close connection between the two. It is the former which is the occasion of the latter. Let us give a simple illustration of this. If I leave my windows unlatched and my doors unlocked, then am I not inviting burglars to enter and rob me? Of course I am. In like manner, if I fail to avail myself of the safeguards which God’s Word sets before me, if I am not careful and watchful against the devil’s approaches, I am open to his assaults. Prevention is better than cure. It is because we fail to use our God-given preventatives that we are so often tripped up by Satan. Let us first name seven ways in which we fail to keep the windows and doors of our souls securely locked against the great thief (Joh 10:10).

First, we “give place to the devil” when *we fail to really believe God’s warning*. His Word plainly tells us that our “adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour” (1Pe 5:8). Ah, but it is one thing to be acquainted with the letter of that verse, but it is quite another to appropriate it and act as though we felt we *were* in real danger from him. O how we need to beg the Holy Spirit to write this word upon our hearts, to bring it home in power to our remembrance each day, to cause us to be cautious and vigilant, knowing that Satan is ever seeking our destruction. God does not preserve careless and heedless souls.

Second, we “give place to the devil” when *we are not on our prayerful guard*. Let us call to mind those words of our Lord’s, “Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation” (Mat 26:41). And let us recall Peter’s sad failure to heed that admonition. How differently he had acted in the high priest’s palace if, instead of “sleeping” in the Garden, he had spent his time in earnest prayer, seeking grace to fortify him against the approaching temptation!

Alas, how often we have repeated Peter's offence. O my reader, make no mistake upon this point, to lapse into a careless and prayerless state of soul renders us easy victims to Satan's deceptions.

Third, we "give place to the devil" when *we fail to "put on the whole armour of God"* (Eph 6:11). That armour is not to be talked about, but used. It is no mock warfare we are called to engage in. The fight is intensely real, and the saving or the losing of our very souls is at issue. That "armour" is provided that we "may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil." But if we do not gird it upon us, then we have no protection, and our very vitals are exposed to his "fiery darts." May it please the Lord to deeply impress upon writer and reader the absolute necessity of our putting on the seven pieces of armour which divine grace has provided for us.

Fourth, we "give place to the devil" when *we fail to confess every known sin*. "He that covereth his sins shall not prosper" (Pro 28:13). Unconfessed sins clog and choke the channel of blessing between our souls and God (Isa 59:2). Not only so, but our unconfessed sins leave the door wide open for Satan to repeat his attacks upon us at the same point. The evil root must be judged before God if its bearing of evil fruit is to cease. Nothing is more necessary if we are to have power against our adversary than for us to keep short accounts with God—to daily own before Him every conscious failure and fall.

Fifth, we "give place to the devil" when *we fail to fully trust God*. "The name of the LORD is a strong tower: the righteous runneth into it, and is safe" or "set aloft" (Pro 18:10), that is, raised above the place where Satan can successfully assail us. While I am completely dependent upon the mighty God, drawing my strength from Him, the devil cannot harm me. It is when I give way to doubting that the enemy finds the opening which he seeks. As soon as my heart begins calling into question God's goodness, it is easy for Satan to fill me with despondency and a despairing heart is just as wrong as having unclean hands.

Sixth, we "give place to the devil" when *we shrink from persecution*. Bearing Christ's "reproach" (Heb 13:13) is inseparable from a faithful going forth unto Him outside the camp. Suffering "affliction with the people of God" is set over against "enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season" (Heb 11:25). And such suffering is to be viewed as a holy privilege and high honour, and not as something to be shunned and ashamed of, for it brings us into fellowship with the sufferings of Christ (Phi 3:10). But when these sufferings are looked at by the eye of sense and the heart sinks, Satan soon gains an advantage and tempts to compromise. "Fear none of those things which thou shalt suffer: behold, the devil shall cast some of you into prison [there are spiritual "prisons" as well as material ones!], that ye may be tried" (Rev 2:10).

Seventh, we "give place to the devil" when *we relax spiritually*. O how much we need to heed that word, "Watch ye, stand fast in the faith, quit you like men, be strong" (1Co 16:13). If we become slack and careless, if we fail to "gird up the loins of your minds" (1Pe 1:13), and keep not our hearts "with *all* diligence" (Pro 4:23), we shall soon be found giving place to the devil. Has the reader noted *what preceded* David's fearful fall? It was, "At the time when kings go forth to battle...*But* David tarried still at Jerusalem" (2Sa 11:1). Hence, in the next verse, we find him idling, lazing, and then—he fell!

The above are some of the more negative ways of “giving place to the devil,” namely, by failing to be armed against him. Let us now mention some of the more positive ways through which he gains an advantage over us. 1. We give place to the devil when *we listen to his evil suggestions*. We do not begin by doing as he wants us, nor even by accepting his whisperings. It is the paying attention to what he says which is the root from which obeying him springs. This is seen clearly in the case of Eve. She parleyed with him before she took of the forbidden fruit. Contrast the Lord Jesus, who promptly rejected His evil suggestions by a verse from the Word of God.

2. We give place to the devil the moment *we begin to compromise*. Solemnly is this illustrated in the case of Ananias and Sapphira. Of them, we are told that they “sold a possession, and kept back *part* of the price.” The remainder was laid at the apostles’ feet. Then Peter said, “Why hath Satan filled thine heart to lie to the Holy Spirit, and to *keep back part*?” (Act 5:1-3). What a solemn voice this has for each of us! Do we not realize that it was Satan who was filling our hearts when we only half consecrated ourselves to the Lord, when we yielded Him only a partial obedience, when we used on ourselves a portion of His tithe, when we refused to thoroughly go forth unto Him “outside the camp”? What is it that *we* are keeping back a “part” of?

3. We give place to the devil when *we become self-sufficient* and independent of God. It was being “lifted up with pride” which brought about the fall of the devil himself (1Ti 3:6). Pride is a subtle thing, for we are largely unconscious of its presence. Nevertheless, it can be easily detected if we take the trouble to examine our motives and trace our actions back to their source. Pride is self-sufficiency. We are controlled by pride whenever we ask not wisdom and strength from God. We are moved by pride when we trust to common sense and “lean unto our own understandings.” Contrariwise, the humble man is he who seeks help from the Lord for everything.

4. We “give place to the devil” when *we put self’s interests before the Lord’s glory*. This was exemplified by the Gadarenes. Christ had come into their midst and graciously delivered a demon-possessed man. The demons then obtained His permission to enter a herd of swine, which rushed into the sea and were destroyed. How awful the sequel, “And they began to pray him to depart out of their coasts” (Mar 5:17)! The demands of the Holy One were too strict for their liking. He interfered with their money-making. They preferred their swine to the Saviour. Does this shock you, dear reader? Then ask God to reveal to you if there is any thing which you are preferring (by your actions) above the honour and glory of His blessed Son.

5. We “give place to the devil” when *we seek the company of and are friendly with his children*. Satan knows full well that “evil communications corrupt good manners,” therefore is he untiring in his efforts to induce God’s children to take upon them an unequal yoke and become intimate with the ungodly. For this reason does God command us, “Have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them” (Eph 5:11). Disobedience to this inevitably leads to our being ensnared by the great enemy.

6. We “give place to the devil” when *we knowingly enter his territory*. God has expressly commanded us, “Enter not into the path of the wicked, and go not in the way of evil men. Avoid it, pass not by it, turn from it, and pass away” (Pro 4:14-15). If we disregard this divine prohibition, then we deliberately expose ourselves to Satan’s

temptations and cannot count upon God delivering us from the same. A solemn example of one who trespassed on the devil's ground is Lot. By settling down in Sodom, he deliberately courted the fearful disaster which overtook his family.

7. We "give place to the devil" when *we allow him to use us to do his work*. As a general rule, the devil works through human instruments and happy is he when he can move a Christian to perform his bidding. It is a solemn consideration that every child of God is controlled, hour by hour, either by the Holy Spirit or the evil spirit. Satan is using us to further his evil ends when he causes us to set an unchristlike example before the ungodly—encouraging them in their sins. He uses the Christian when he can get him to sow the seeds of discord among brethren. And how often has he used a Christian to undermine the influence of a servant of God by speaking evil about him to others! Let us now point out some of *the devil's tactics*.

1. He aims to inject doubts into our minds. This is seen in the method which he employed with Eve. He endeavours to raise questionings in our hearts. Particularly is this true in prayer, while we are waiting for God to fulfill the promise which we have pleaded. Hence, the Saviour said, "If ye have faith, *and doubt not*" (Mat 21:21).

2. He aims to discredit God in our esteem. This is seen in his attack upon Job. It was the devil who moved his wife to bid him, "Curse God and die." With this before us, there is no excuse for any Christian being "ignorant of his devices." When trials come upon us, Satan tempts unto hard thoughts against God, seeking to make us believe that He is unkind and unjust in His dealings.

3. He aims to puff us up with pride. This is seen in the temptation he presented to David to number the people (1Ch 21:1). Much watchfulness and prayer is needed to guard against this. If he cannot make us conceited over our natural endowments and possessions, he will seek to make us proud of our devotedness and obedience to God, our liberality and kindness to others, and even of our humility. The safeguard against this is to remind ourselves constantly that we have nothing but what we have ourselves first received of God (1Co 4:7).

4. He aims to destroy full dependency upon God. This is seen in his first temptation of Christ in Matthew 4. The Son of God had taken upon Himself the form of a servant, and the devil said, "*Command* that these stones be made bread" (Mat 4:3). Christ was an hungered and Satan says, "Trust God no longer. Take things into your own hands." He tempts us to act independently. He seeks to prevent our earnestly seeking from God divine guidance, wisdom, strength, and blessing.

5. He aims to induce reckless trifling with God. When he fails to bring us to distrust God, he seeks to fling us to the opposite extreme and get us to act presumptuously. This is seen in his second temptation of Christ. "Since you trust God fully, cast thyself down from the pinnacle of the temple." (See Mat 4:5-6). Beware of tempting God (under the guise of strong faith) by refusing to take wise precautions, use legitimate means, or needlessly expose yourself to danger.

6. He aims to fix our hearts on worldly things. This is seen in his third temptation of Christ, when he showed Him all its kingdoms and their glory. There are many subtle forms of this temptation, such as coveting a beautiful home, aspiring after a high position in

business, following the fashions of the ungodly in our dress, conforming to their ways in our hours of recreation. If we more definitely sought grace to heed that exhortation, "Be content with such things as ye have" (Heb 13:5), we should be delivered from many snares and sorrows.

7. He aims to prevent the denying of self and the daily taking up of the cross. This comes out clearly in Matthew 16:21-24. Let the reader slowly ponder those verses. "Spare thyself" is the motto which the devil would have us live by. Beware of lazing in the evenings instead of "redeeming the time" (Eph 5:16).

8. He aims to blind the mind (2Co 4:4) and becloud our judgment. He often accomplishes this by Scriptures themselves, causing us to wrongly understand them or use them irrelevantly. When we ought to do as David did in Psalm 119:60, he tells us, "He that believeth shall not make haste" (Isa 28:16). When we ought to rebuke sin in a brother (Lev 19:17), he quotes to us, "Judge not that ye be not judged" (Mat 7:1). Sometimes he blinds people's minds by the sound of words like, "This is my body" (Luk 22:19) or "all" in John 12:32, etc.

9. He aims to catch away the Word of God out of our hearts (Luk 8:12). Oftentimes he is very successful in this, because we have failed to definitely seek God's intervention or because we have failed to fix the Scriptures in our mind by meditating upon them. Satan is also catching away the seed by making people believe that many portions of God's Word are not for them, but for the Jews.

10. He aims to afflict our bodies so that they are incapacitated for the performance of duties or of spiritual exercises (Luk 13:11). He often causes us to eat too much, so that we are dull and drowsy when reading the Word or hearing God's servants preach. He produces lassitude and weakness, but God can "renew our strength" (Isa 40:29-31).

Now dear friend, turn into definite, daily, believing prayer, what has been before you that God would deliver you from these Satanic snares. Be constantly on the alert to recognize the devil's approach to you through persons and things. Remember that it was "While men *slept*" that he sowed his tares (Mat 13:25)! Plead unto God 1 John 3:8 and beg Him to make it good in your life.

(The above is the substance of an address given by the editor at Glenholden, PA on May 23, 1932.)

ASSURANCE

"Can true believers be infallibly assured that they are in the estate of grace and that they shall persevere therein unto salvation? Answer: Such as truly believe in Christ, and endeavor to walk in all good conscience before Him (1Jo 2:3), may, without extraordinary revelation, by faith grounded upon the truth of God's promises, and by the Spirit enabling them to discern in themselves those graces to which the promises of life are made (1Jo 3:14, 18-19, 21, 24; Heb 5:11-12, etc.), and bearing witness with their spirits that they are

the children of God (Rom 8:16), be infallibly assured that they are in the estate of grace and shall persevere therein unto salvation (1Jo 5:13; 2Ti 1:12)."

"Assurance is the believer's full conviction that, through the work of Christ alone, received by faith, he is in possession of a salvation in which he will be eternally kept. And this assurance rests only upon the Scripture promises to him who believes."

The careful reader will perceive a considerable difference of doctrine in the two quotations given above. The former is the product of the Puritans; the latter is a fair sample of what the boasted enlightenment of the twentieth century has brought forth. The one is extracted from the Westminster Catechism of Faith (the doctrinal standard of the Presbyterians); the other is taken from the "Schofield Bible." In the one, the balance of truth is helpfully preserved. In the second, the work and witness of the Holy Spirit is altogether ignored. This example is only one out of scores we could cite, which sadly illustrates how far we have gone backwards. The answer given by the Puritans is calculated to lead to heart searchings. The definition (if such it may be called) of the popular dispensationalist is likely to bolster up the deluded. This brings us to consider, more definitely,

I. Its Nature

Let us begin by asking the question, Assurance *of what?* That the Holy Scriptures are the inspired and infallible Word of God? No, that is not our subject. Assured that salvation is by grace alone? No, for neither is that our immediate theme. Rather, the assurance that I am no longer in a state of nature, but in a state of grace. And this, not as a mere conjectural persuasion, but as resting on sure evidence. It is a well authenticated realization that not only has my mind been enlightened concerning the great truths of God's Word, but that a supernatural work has been wrought in my soul, which has made me a new creature in Christ Jesus. A scriptural assurance of salvation is that knowledge which the Holy Spirit imparts to the heart, through the Scriptures, that *my* "faith" is not a natural one, but "the faith *of God's elect*" (Ti 1:1), that my love for Christ is sincere and not fictitious, that my daily walk is that of a regenerated man.

The assurance of the saints is, as the Westminster divines said, "By the Spirit enabling them to discern in themselves those graces to which the promises of life are made." Let us seek to amplify that statement. At the commencement of Matthew 5, we find the Lord Jesus pronouncing *blessed* a certain class of people. They are not named as "believers" or "saints," but instead are described by their characters, and it is only by comparing ourselves and others with the description that the Lord Jesus there gave that we are enabled to *identify* such. First, He said, "Blessed are the poor in spirit" (Mat 5:3). To be "poor in spirit" is to have a feeling sense that in me, that is, in my flesh, there "dwelleth no good thing" (Rom 7:18). It is the realization that I am utterly destitute of anything and everything which could commend me favourably to God's notice. It is to recognize that I am a spiritual bankrupt. It is the consciousness, even now (not years ago, when I was first awakened), that I am without strength and wisdom, that I am a helpless creature, completely dependent upon the grace and mercy of God. To be "poor in spirit" is the opposite of Laodiceanism, which consists of self-complacency and self-sufficiency, imagining I am "rich, and in need of nothing."

“Blessed are they that mourn” (Mat 5:4). It is one thing to believe the theory that I am spiritually a poverty-stricken pauper, it is quite another to have an acute sense of it in my soul. Where the latter exists, there are deep exercises of heart, which evoke the bitter cry, “My leanness, my leanness, woe unto me!” (Isa 24:16). There is deep anguish that there is so little growth in grace, so little fruit to God’s glory, such a wretched return made for His abounding goodness unto me. This is accompanied by an ever-deepening discovery of the depths of corruption which is still within me. The soul finds that when it would do good, evil is present with him (Rom 7:21). It is grieved by the motions of unbelief, the swellings of pride, the surgings of rebellion against God. Instead of peace, there is war within. Instead of realizing his holy aspirations, the blessed one is daily defeated. Until the stricken heart cries out, “O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?” (Rom 7:24).

“Blessed are the meek” (Mat 5:5). Meekness is *yieldedness*. It is the opposite of self-will. Meekness is pliability and meltedness of heart, which makes me submissive and responsive to God’s will. Now observe, dear reader, these first three marks of the “Blessed” consist not in outward actions, but of inward graces. Not in showy deeds, but in states of soul. Note too that they are far from being characteristics which will render their possessor pleasing and popular to the world. He who feels himself to be a spiritual pauper will not be welcomed by the wealthy Laodiceans. He who daily mourns for his leanness, his barrenness, his sinfulness, will not be courted by the self-righteous. He who is truly meek will not be sought after by the self-assertive. No, he will be scorned by the Pharisees and looked upon with contempt by those who boast they are “out of Romans 7 and living in Romans 8.” These lovely graces, which are of great price in the sight of God, are despised by the bloated professors of the day.

We must not now review the additional marks of the “Blessed” named by the Redeemer at the beginning of His precious Sermon on the Mount, but at one other we will just glance. “Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness’ sake....Blessed are ye when men shall revile you...for my sake” (Mat 5:10-11). Observe that this antagonism is not evoked by wrongdoing or by a well-grounded offence. They who are morose, selfish, haughty, evil speakers, cruel, have no right to shelter behind this beatitude when people retaliate against them. No, it is where Christliness of character and conduct is assailed. Where practical godliness condemns the worldly ways of empty professors, that fires their enmity—where humble but vital piety cannot be tolerated by those who are destitute of the same. Blessed, said Christ, are the spiritual, whom the carnal hate—the gentle sheep, whom the dogs snap at.

Now dear reader, seek grace to honestly measure yourself by these criteria. Do such heavenly graces adorn your soul? Are these marks, of those whom the Son of God pronounces “Blessed,” stamped upon *your* character? Are you truly “poor in spirit”? We say, “truly,” for it is easy to adopt expressions and call ourselves names—if you are offended when someone else applies them to you, it shows you do not mean what you say. Do you “mourn” over your lack of conformity to Christ, the feebleness of your faith, the coldness of your love? Are you “meek”? Has your will been broken and your heart made submissive to God? Do you hunger and thirst after righteousness?—does your use of the means of grace, your searchings of the Scriptures, your prayers, evince it? Are you

“merciful,” or censorious and harsh? Are you “pure in heart”?—grieved when an impure imagination assails? If not, you have no right to regard yourself as “Blessed.” Instead, you are under the curse of a holy and sin-hating God.

It is *not*—Are these spiritual graces *fully developed* within you—they never are in this life. But are they truly present at all? It is not, are you completely emptied of self, but is it your sincere desire and earnest prayer to be so. It is not, do you “mourn” as deeply as you ought to over indwelling sin and its activities, but have you *felt* at all “the plague” of your own heart (1Ki 8:38). It is not, is your meekness all that can be desired, but is there unmistakable proof that the root of it has actually been communicated to your soul? There is a growth, “First the blade, then the ear, then the full corn in the ear.” But that which has no existence can have no growth. Has the “seed” (1Pe 1:23) of grace been planted in your heart. *That* is the point which each of us is called upon to determine—not to assume or take for granted, but to make “sure” of (2Pe 1:10). And this is done when we faithfully examine our hearts to discover whether or not there is in them those spiritual graces to which the promises of God are addressed.

While Gospel assurance is the opposite of carnal presumption and of unbelieving doubts, yet it is far from being opposed to thorough self-examination. But alas, so many have been taught, and by men highly reputed for their orthodoxy, that if it is not actually wrong, it is highly injurious for a Christian to look within. There is a *balance* of truth to be observed here, as everywhere. That one might become too introspective is readily granted, but that a Christian is never to search his own heart, test his faith, scrutinize his motives, and make sure that he has the “root of the matter” within him (Job 19:28), is contradicted by many plain Scriptures. Regeneration is a work which God performs *within* us (Phi 1:6), and as eternal destiny hinges on the same, it behoves every serious soul to take the utmost pains and ascertain whether or not this miracle of grace has been wrought within him. When Paul stood in doubt of the state of the Galatians, he said, “My little children, of whom I travail in birth again until Christ be formed *in* you” (Gal 4:19). So to the Colossians, he wrote, “Christ *in* you, the hope of glory” (Col 1:27).

“For everyone that doeth evil hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reprov'd. But he that doeth truth cometh to the light, that his deeds may be made manifest, that they are wrought in [or by] God” (Joh 3:20-21). Here is one of the vital differences between the unregenerate and the regenerate, the unbelieving and the believing. Unbelief is far more than an error of judgment, or speculative mistake into which an *honest* mind may fall. It proceeds from heart-enmity against God. The natural man, while left to himself, hates the searching light of God (Joh 3:19), fearful lest it should disquiet the conscience, expose the fallacy of his presumptuous confidence, and shatter his false peace. But it is the very reverse with him who has been given “an honest and good heart” (Luk 8:15). He who acts sincerely and conscientiously, desiring to know and do the whole will of God without reserve, welcomes the light.

The genuine Christian believes what Scripture says concerning the natural heart, namely, that it is “deceitful above all things” (Jer 17:9). And the surest proof that he *does* believe this solemn fact is that he is deeply concerned lest “a deceived heart hath turned *him* aside” (Isa 44:20), and caused him to believe that all is well with his soul, when in reality he is yet “in the gall of bitterness, and the bond of iniquity” (Act 8:23). He believes

what God's Word says about Satan, the great deluder, and trembles lest, after all, the devil has beguiled him with a false peace. Such a possibility, such a likelihood, occasions him much exercise of soul. Like David of old (and every other genuine saint), he "communes with his own heart" (Psa 4:4), and "his spirit makes *diligent search*" (Psa 77:6). He turns to the light of Holy Writ, anxious to have his character and conduct scrutinized by the same, desiring to have his deeds made manifest, as to whether they proceed from self-love or real love to God.

It is not that we are here seeking to foster any confidence in self, rather do we desire to promote real confidence toward God. It is one thing to make sure that I love God, and it is quite another for me to find satisfaction in that love. The self-examination which the Scriptures enjoin (in 1 Corinthians 11:28, for example) is *not* for the purpose of finding something within to make me more acceptable to God, nor as a ground of my justification before Him, but is with the object of discovering whether Christ is being formed in me. There are two extremes to be guarded against—such an undue occupation with the work of the Spirit *within*, that the heart is taken right off from the work of Christ *for* His people, and such a one-sided emphasis upon the imputed righteousness of Christ, that the righteousness *imparted* by the Spirit is ignored or disparaged. It is impossible that the Third Person of the Trinity should take up His abode within a soul without effecting a radical change within him. And it is *this* which I need to make sure of. It is the Spirit's work within the heart which is the only infallible proof of salvation.

It is perfectly true that as I look within and seek to faithfully examine my heart in the light of Scripture that the work of the Spirit is *not all* I shall discover there. No, indeed—much corruption still remains. The genuine Christian finds clear evidence of *two* natures, two contrary principles at work within him. This is brought out plainly, not only in Romans 7 and Galatians 5:17, but strikingly too in the Song of Solomon. "What will ye see in the Shulamite? As it were the company of *two* armies" (Song 6:13). Hence, it is that in her present state, the Bride says, "I am black, but comely, O ye daughters of Jerusalem, as the tents of Kedar, as the curtains of Solomon" (Song 1:5). And again, "I sleep, but my heart waketh" (Song 5:2)—strange language to the natural man, but quite intelligible to the spiritual. And therefore is it also that the renewed soul so often finds suited to his case the prayer of Mark 9:24, "Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief."

It is because the real Christian finds within himself so much that is conflicting, that it is difficult for him to be sure of his actual state. And therefore does he cry, "Examine me, O Lord, and prove me; try my reins and my heart" (Psa 26:2). They who are filled with a carnal assurance, a fleshly confidence, a vain presumption, feel no need for asking the Lord to "prove" *them*. So completely has Satan deceived them that they imagine it would be an act of unbelief so to do. Poor souls, they "call evil good, and good evil." They "put darkness for light, and light for darkness" (Isa 5:20). One of the surest marks of regeneration is that the soul frequently cries, "Search me, O God, and know my heart: try me, and know my thoughts: and see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting" (Psa 139:23-24).

Perhaps some of our readers are still ready to say, "I do not see that there needs to be so much difficulty in ascertaining whether one is in a lost or saved condition. I am resting upon John 5:24 and that is sufficient for me." But allow us to point out, dear friend, that

John 5:24 is *not a promise* which Christ gave to an individual disciple, but instead, a doctrinal declaration which He made in the hearing of a mixed multitude. If the objector replies, "I believe that verse does contain a promise and I am going to hold fast to it." Then may we lovingly ask, "Are you sure that it belongs *to you*?" That John 5:24 contains a precious promise, we gladly acknowledge, but to whom is it made? Let us examine it. "Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death unto life."

That promise is given to a definitely defined character, namely, "He that *heareth my word*." Now dear reader, can it be truthfully said that you are one that "heareth" His Word? Are you sure? Do not be misled by the mere sound of words. The reference here is not to the hearing of the outward ear, but to the response of the heart. In the days that He sojourned on earth, there were many of whom the Lord Jesus had to say that "hearing [with the outward ear], they hear not" with the heart (Mat 13:13). So it is still. To "hear" spiritually, to "hear" savingly, is to *heed* (Mat 18:15), is to *obey* (Mat 17:5; Joh 10:27; Heb 3:7). Ah, are *you* obedient? Have you searched the Scriptures diligently in order to discover His commandments? And that, not to satisfy an idle curiosity, but desiring to put them into practice? Do you love His commandments? Are you actually *doing* them? Not once or twice, but regularly, as the main tenor of your life—for note, it is not "hear," but "heareth."

Does some one object, "All of this is getting away from the *simplicity* of Christ. You are taking us from the Word and seeking to get us occupied with ourselves." Well, does not Scripture say, "Take heed unto thyself" (1Ti 4:16)? But it may be answered, "There cannot be any *certainty* while we are occupied with our wretched selves. I prefer to abide by the written Word." To this, we have no objection at all. What we are here pressing is the vital necessity of making sure that the portions of the Word you cite or are resting upon, fairly and squarely *belong to you*. The reader may refer me to, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved" (Act 16:31) and ask, "Is not that plain enough?" But have you ever noted, dear friend, to whom the apostles addressed those words and all the attendant circumstances?

It was neither to a promiscuous crowd, nor to a careless and unconcerned soul that the apostles said, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved." Rather was it to an awakened, deeply exercised, penitent soul, who had taken his place in the dust, and in deepest anguish cried, "What must I do to be saved?" However, what is the *use* you are making of Acts 16:31? You answer, "This: Those words are divinely simple. I believe in Christ and therefore, I am saved. *God* says so and the devil cannot shake me." Possibly he is not at all anxious to. He may be well content for you to retain a carnal confidence. But observe, dear friend, the apostles did not tell the stricken jailor to "Believe on Jesus" nor, "Believe in Christ," but to "Believe on *the Lord Jesus Christ*."

What does it mean to *savingly* "believe"? We have sought to answer this question at length in our recent articles on "Saving Faith." But let us now give a brief reply. John 1:12 makes it clear that to "believe" is to "receive," to receive "Christ Jesus *the Lord*" (Col 2:6). Christ is the Saviour of none until He is welcomed as LORD. The immediate context shows plainly the particular character in which Christ is there viewed, "He came unto *His*

own” (Joh 1:11). He was their rightful Owner, because their Lord. But “His own received Him not.” No, they declared, “We will not have this man to reign over us” (Luk 19:14). Ah, dear friend, this is searching. Have *you* received “*The Lord Jesus Christ*”? We do not ask, “Are you resting on His finished work,” but have you bowed to His scepter and owned His authority in a *practical* way? Have you *disowned your own* sinful lordship? If not, you certainly *have not* “believed on *the Lord Jesus Christ*,” and therefore, the promise of Acts 16:31 does not belong to you.

“Now if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his” (Rom 8:9). *This* is just as much a part of God’s Word as is Acts 16:31. Why do we not hear it quoted as frequently! And how can any one *know* that he *is* indwelt by the Spirit of Christ? Only by discovering within him the *fruits* of His regenerating and sanctifying grace. *Not* that either these “fruits” or the “good works” of the Christian are in any wise or to any degree meritorious. No, no, but as the *evidence* of his divine sonship.

FOOD ASSURED

“But when the morning was now come, Jesus stood on the shore: but the disciples knew not that it was Jesus. Then Jesus said unto them, children, have ye any meat?”
(Joh 21:4-5).

Every incident in relation to Christ and His love to His people becomes interesting, and here is a very sweet one. Christ was now risen from the dead. But His disciples had only faith and indistinct notions of the immense importance of this glorious event. They, therefore, were returned to their employment of fishing, as unconscious of what the resurrection from the dead should mean. All night they had been employed in a fruitless pursuit and when the morning began to dawn, Christ stood on the shore, but their eyes were holden that they should not know Him. My soul! Learn from hence that Christ is often with thee, often looking on thee, and often providing and preparing for thee, while thou art ignorant of His presence and His love. He speaks to them, before they speak to Him. Yes, “If we love him, it is because he first loved us.” And what doth Christ say? “Children, have ye any meat?” Precious account of Christ! My soul, turn over the several blessed particulars shewn here in it. He calls them children. Yes, His people are His children, for He is the everlasting Father, as well as their Husband and Brother. Indeed, He stands in place of all relations and fills all. My soul, if thou didst but consider this, and keep the remembrance of it always uppermost in thine heart, how wouldest thou delight to go to Christ, as to a “brother born for adversity, a friend that loveth at all times, and one who sticketh closer than a brother.”

Observe how earnest the Lord is concerning their present state and safety. Oh that every child of God in Christ would learn from hence that Christ takes part in all that concerns them. Surely this solicitude of Christ takes in the whole of a believer’s warfare. Are they poor in this world? Do they seek their bread out of desolate places? Like the disciples, do they toil all night and gain nothing? And shall not He, who providently caters

for the sparrow, know it and provide for them, amidst all their manifold necessities? Look up, my poor afflicted brother (if perchance such an one should read these lines), look up, I say, and behold Christ in this endearing instance of tenderness to the wants of His few faithful disciples. He that caused a miraculous draught of fishes to supply the pressing needs of His disciples, can, and will equally now, regard the state of all His redeemed ones under their various temporal straits and difficulties. The promise is absolute and hath never failed, "He shall dwell on high: his place of defence shall be the munitions of rocks: bread shall be given him; his waters shall be sure" (Isa 33:16). And as for spiritual famine, when at any time the waters of the sanctuary run low, Christ is the Almighty Governor, our spiritual Joseph, through all the Egyptian state of His people here below, and He speaks to every one, yea, to thee my soul, in the number, "Children, have ye any meat?" Lamb of God, though Thou art now in Thine exalted state, yet not all the church is glory above, nor all the hallelujahs of heaven, can detain Thee one moment from knowing and visiting and supplying all the manifold wants of Thy church in grace here below. Doth Christ say to me, "Hast thou any meat?" Lord, I would answer, "Thou art 'the bread of life, and the bread of God; yea the living bread, which cometh down from heaven, and giveth life to the world.'" (See Joh 6:51) Precious Christ! Be Thou my bread, my life, my hope, my fulness, my joy, and my portion forever (Robert Hawker, 1825).



Holy Bridegroom, glorious Head,
 Of Thy beloved Bride,
 By Thee may I be daily fed,
 And nourish'd by Thy side;
 Forsaking all the worthless toys
 Of vain carnality;
 Tasting of everlasting joys,
 And immortality.

Fix Thy great love within my heart,
 That I may give Thee praise;
 And never let me more depart
 From Thy most holy ways.
 Plainly showing to all around
 That I am Thine indeed;
 That grace may over sin abound,
 As of the holy seed.

Lord Jesus, set our hearts on fire
 With Thy unchanging love,
 That through Thy grace we may aspire
 To reign with Thee above.
 Let us not sleep, as others do,
 But earnest be in prayer;
 Looking for and hast'ning to
 Our meeting in the air.

Edward Kirby, 1871

